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FOR G/IWI AND AF A/S FRAZER

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SUBJECT: International Women's Day and Mission Efforts on Gender Equity

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11. On March 11 the Ambassador hosted a reception for 500 prominent

Kenya women to celebrate International Women's Day. The event and the Ambassador's remarks were widely covered by the media. Guests included women from civil society, the private sector, government, Parliament, and various walks of life. The Ambassador used the event to highlight support for gender equity as one of the Mission's top priorities. He also emphasized U.S. support for the political accord, and emphasized the key role women played in achieving that. The International Women's Day event was part of a coordinated Mission effort to address a wide range of issues regarding gender equity. These efforts include the

Women's Justice and Empowerment Initiative, which was signed in December

12007. A Mission working group coordinates efforts to ensure a comprehensive approach drawing on all appropriate USG resources. Reftel

reported on the Mission's use of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women as an opportunity to carry out an extensive program during the 16 days of activism and to highlight gender equity as a policy priority.

12. Begin text of Ambassador's remarks.

I warmly welcome you to celebrate International Women's Day. We are joining together to celebrate the strength, courage, and contributions of women everywhere. I want to stress that the United States is strongly committed to promoting gender equity. We want to work with you to foster the rights of Kenyan women and their increased participation in all aspects of social, political, and economic life.

We view this as an integral part of the strong and growing  
U.S.-Kenyan  
Partnership.

Though their efforts are sometimes invisible in the larger world,  
women  
are often the real agents for change in society, working to improve  
the  
lives of the people in their communities even as they struggle to  
feed  
and educate their children. The importance of the role of a woman  
and  
mother is highlighted in the Kiswahili proverb: Asiyefunzwa na  
mamaye  
ufunzwa na ulimwengu (If you do not follow your mother's teachings,  
the  
world will take over). Unleashing the potential of women is  
crucial  
in so many ways, from economic development to the welfare of  
families.  
In fact, without full and open participation of women in all aspects  
of  
society, strong and lasting democratic development will not be  
achieved. Studies show that when a higher number of women hold  
elected  
office, the rate of public corruption declines while other quality  
of  
life indicators rise. I know that some of the distinguished women  
here recently participated in the UN Conference on the Status of  
Women  
which discussed these very issues. I congratulate you for so ably  
representing the women of Kenya.

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Among so many distinguished women here this evening, I would like to  
recognize Fatuma Abdulkadir Adan. Fatuma works to promote  
non-violent  
conflict resolution among the Borana and Gabra peoples. She also has  
worked tirelessly to reduce the resistance of Borana and Gabra  
elders  
to female political candidates. For these efforts, Fatuma was our  
Mission's nominee for the State Department's 2007 Freedom Defenders  
award. Congratulations to you Fatuma.

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Political Gains, But Much  
Remains to be Accomplished  
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Kenyan women are making hard-fought gains, but much more remains to  
be  
accomplished. In the 2007 elections a record number of women ran  
for  
public office at all levels, and did so with immense courage in the  
face of threats and violence. Their perseverance paid dividends as  
21  
women were sworn in as members of the 10th Parliament. Although  
this  
number is still low, there are reasons for continued optimism.  
Women  
MPs from the 9th Parliament who ran for re-election recaptured their  
seats at nearly twice the rate of male incumbents. This shows that  
when women overcome the many obstacles Kenyan political culture  
presents and gain positions of authority, they gain the respect and  
loyalty of their constituents and are accepted as leaders. While  
the  
10th Parliament will focus particularly on the reform process, I

urge  
the women MPs to use their five-year term to advance issues of  
gender  
equity and build upon the legacy of their predecessors who were  
instrumental in passing landmark legislation, such as the Sexual  
Offenses Act of 2006.

The US will continue to assist women in exercising their right to  
political participation by funding programs to develop women  
leaders.

Last year, five Kenyan women participated in the Embassy's  
International Visitors program, undertaking study programs on  
politics,  
law, and conflict resolution that they have applied in their work in

Kenya. In addition, ten Kenyan women visited the U.S. for two  
weeks  
under the "Kenyans Working for Good Governance" citizen exchange  
program organized by the League of Women Voters and funded by the  
U.S.

These programs will continue to support women in their quest for  
increased representation in Kenya's political life.

While noting how much remains to be accomplished, it is also  
important  
to take stock of how much has been achieved, particularly during the

past five years. I commend President Kibaki for the initiative he  
undertook to institute a program of affirmative action in government

hiring. I also welcome the government's recently announced  
commitment  
to increase by 2 billion KS the Women's Enterprise Fund.

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The Political Crisis  
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As we know too well, the recent crisis and the violence which

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accompanied it caused great pain and suffering in Kenya. Women and  
their children suffered the most. In my visits to displaced persons  
camps, I have been deeply touched by the resilience and strength of  
women -- who have often lost everything -- and impressed by their  
desire  
to pick up the pieces and build a better future for themselves and  
their families

Kenyan women played a crucial role in resolving this country's  
recent  
political crisis. The voices of the mothers, sisters and daughters  
of  
Kenya reverberated with the leadership of both sides. Groups like  
Vital Voices, Women for Peace and Justice, and the Federation of  
Women  
Lawyers, just to name a few, were at the forefront of calming  
tensions  
and helping achieve an equitable solution. Countless women played a

similar role in thousands of communities and households across the  
country. I congratulate you for playing such a crucial role to  
energize Kenya's democratic spirit in such an effective way. Your  
country owes you an immense debt of gratitude.

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Recognizing Defenders of Human Rights and Peace  
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There are too many distinguished women in attendance tonight to  
recognize all your contributions to achieving the political accord  
and

ending violence. I will just cite one who has played an important role in civil society:

-- Njeri Kabeberi, Executive Director of the Center for Multi-Party Democracy

She is just one of the many Kenyans who spoke out publicly for peace, justice and the defense of human rights. As a result she, along with other human rights defenders, received death threats, but carried on in this important work. Your bravery and dedication to Kenya are an inspiration to us all.

I would also like to recognize Ms. Betty Maina who, as chair of the Kenyan Association of Manufacturers, organized the business community to bring pressure on political leaders. Working tirelessly, she made known the negative economic effects of the crisis on the business community and on the average Kenyan.

I urge each and every one of you to continue to press your leaders as they implement the reform agenda in order to ensure that they fulfill the promise of a more inclusive, more prosperous, and more just Kenya.

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Historic Opportunities and U.S. Support  
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The unprecedented crisis which Kenya experienced provides an historic opportunity for the country to emerge with stronger democratic institutions, an even more vibrant economy to benefit all citizens, and a more inclusive and cohesive society. I want to note just a few of the many efforts we are undertaking both to help Kenya emerge

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stronger from the crisis and, more broadly, to promote gender equity.

--The United States will provide support as Kenyans work to recover from the crisis and address the underlying causes that fueled violence. I recently announced that the U.S. government has pledged \$25 million to support Kenya's reform, reconciliation, and rebuilding process.

Kenyan women, who will be at the forefront of these efforts, will directly benefit from this support.

--To address gender-based violence, the US and Kenyan governments recently signed the Women's Justice Empowerment Initiative, which will provide \$10 million to the Kenyan government as it implements the Sexual Offenses Act of 2006. This initiative will increase public awareness of the availability of legal remedies and care and support services and strengthening the capacity of the legal system -- from investigation through prosecution -- to protect women from sexual violence. Working together with the Kenyan government, we will create Kenya's first-ever rape crisis center with DNA forensics equipment, donated by the US government. In addition, we plan to extend and

deepen our cooperation with our civil society partners whose programs address gender-based violence.

--In the area of health, we are continuing to support programs reduce the incidence of Female Genital Mutilation. The Mission works with

teachers to reach a larger proportion of affected communities, especially the children they teach, to reduce the rate of FGM in Kenya.

In other areas of the country, we fund programs that promote an alternative coming-of-age rite to take the place of FGM. For example, Ruth Konchellah and her organization Cherish Others is implementing an anti-FGM/C education program aimed at school children in the TransMara region. This program will reach approximately 600 young women and 30

village leaders. I am pleased to announce that, for the second year in a row, we will support and I will participate in Cherish Other's annual anti-FGM run in April. This worthwhile event brings needed public attention to the need to eliminate FGM. I only wish I was going to be more of a threat to the Kenyan runners.

--In that regard, yet another remarkable example of the initiatives women are undertaking is the famous Kenyan runner Tegla Laroupe. We regularly support and I regularly attend the peace runs which she sponsors to bring together groups in conflict in the Kapenguria area.

--Through the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the U.S. Government is providing significant support to Kenyan women and girls in the context of prevention, treatment, and care of HIV.

Two-thirds of those receiving PEPFAR-supported anti-retroviral therapy in Kenya are women. Nearly 800,000 pregnant women in Kenya have received counseling and testing for prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, and more than 50,000 of mothers testing HIV+ have received a complete course of anti-retroviral prophylaxis to protect

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their babies from infection.

PEPFAR was also the first development partner in Kenya to support both integrated gender-based violence and HIV programs at Nairobi Women's

Hospital and the provision of post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) to women who have been raped and potentially exposed to HIV. PEPFAR remains the sole development partner to disaggregate its HIV program data by gender, a critical step to ensure HIV interventions are targeted to, and sensitive of, the unique vulnerabilities faced by women and girls.

--We know that economic empowerment of women is one of the most effective ways to improve their status. Currently women provide 80 percent of agricultural labor and manage 40 percent of Kenya's smallholder farms, yet they own only 1 per cent of agricultural land and access only 10 per cent of credit. USAID Economic Growth

programs  
have helped women increase their access to finance, markets and  
trade,  
and improved agricultural inputs and technologies. We will redouble  
our  
efforts to see that micro-finance efforts are targeted to women who  
have suffered in the post-election crisis.

--Education is another key to improving the lives of women. We  
support  
girls' education through the Ambassador's Scholarship Program, which  
provides scholarships to 3,000 female primary and secondary school  
students.

In these and many other ways, we are working to promote gender  
equity.  
It is vitally important that we work in close consultation with  
civil  
society and the government to ensure that programs are effective.  
With  
this goal in mind, I am pleased to announce tonight the formation of  
a  
Women's Advisory Panel on Gender Equity Issues to share ideas and  
feedback with me and my team. I will invite representatives of  
civil  
society, business, and academia to participate. I look forward to  
your  
insights and advice. This initiative testifies to our commitment to  
intensifying our partnership with Kenya's women in order to help  
empower them.

Looking at the accomplishments of Kenyan women, there is great  
reason  
to be hopeful about the future. Before closing, I want to recognize  
five outstanding examples of young women; from the powerful to the  
humble.

--I want to congratulate Munza Hanif, who was the top female student  
in  
the 2007 KSCE. I commend you for your hard work and initiative.  
You  
have a very bright future ahead of you, and we'll be expecting great  
things!

--Suzanne Kilolo, who is the investment manager for African Alliance  
Kenya Investment Bank. There she manages client portfolios valued  
at  
10 billion Kshs, showing that bright, ambitious women can succeed in  
the financial services sector.

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--Serah Mwangi, who as managing director of Focus Publishers for the  
past 13 years, has been instrumental in nourishing the careers of  
some  
of Kenya's best authors and built a successful business at the same  
time.

--Eddah Wambui, a mother of two, who supports her two boys working  
long  
hours as a shoeshine at city market. She is, quite literally, a  
shining example.

--Inviolata Mmbwavi, an HIV positive mother of a teenage daughter,  
who  
has been a tireless advocate for the rights of HIV positive  
Kenyans.

Inviolata recently formed her own organization, Positive Living Support Groups Networks, to assist HIV positive persons. We wish you much success in your new endeavor.

Let me close by quoting the writer Margaret Ogola regarding the all-important role Kenyan women and mothers play: Mamangu alinipa busara na maisha ya mamake pamoja na nyanyake. Nguvu na msaada ambazo zinapatikana katika jamii ya Waafrika ni muhimu zaidi kwa kuwa ni sehemu ya utamaduni wetu na zinapaswa kuhifadhiwa na kulelewa kwa vyovyote vile. ("My mother handed down to me the wisdom and lives of her own mother and grandmother. This strength and support that is found in the African family is the most important part of our culture, and should be preserved and nurtured at all costs.")

Please take advantage of tonight's well-deserved opportunity to celebrate your many accomplishments. Thank you all for coming. I wish you all continued success as you work to ensure a brighter future for Kenya and Kenyan women.

End text.  
RANNEBERGER